

The returns for the counties and islands allotted to me gave a total number of 7,682, including half-castes living as members of a Maori tribe, which, compared with the numbers for the same counties in 1886, shows a decrease over the whole of 536. This, however, must not be looked upon as absolutely correct, because the King Natives, wherever they were living, refused to give any information whatsoever regarding themselves, their cultivation, or their live-stock, so that returns from districts where they are living are, so far as they are concerned, estimated. Out of the ten counties above mentioned, three only show a decrease, whilst seven and the islands show an increase. The largest decrease is in Kawhia County, and the next largest in Thames County. The former is, I think, accounted for by the fact that, since the last census was taken in 1886, Tawhiao's large settlement at Whatiwhatihoe (within Kawhia County) has broken up, and the Natives who then lived there are now scattered about, but mostly, when not away gum-digging, living at Pukekawa within Raglan County, and at Maungakawa and Maungatautari within Piako County. The decrease in the Thames County is caused, I think, by a falling-off of the number of Natives from other districts that have been in the habit of going yearly to the Tairua and Whangamata Gumfields. There were large numbers of them there in 1886. For further particulars regarding the Maori census, I would refer you to my census returns and report.

*Native Land Court in the King-country.*

The Native Land Court has not reopened here since its adjournment in December last, so that nothing has been done to put the titles to Native land in the Rohepotae Block (or King-country) in a more satisfactory condition than that in which they were left when the Court adjourned. The Court has now been sitting here more or less continuously since July, 1886, and orders have been made for 254 blocks, representing an area of over a million and a half acres of land. But, although the owners of those blocks have been declared by Court, and their names duly recorded in the Court's orders, there are nearly a hundred blocks, representing collectively more than a million acres of some of the best land in the King-country, in which there has been no definition by the Court of the owners' interests. Owners having large ownership, others with small ownership, and many with no ownership at all, other than that they were included in the lists of names by the real owners through *aroha* (affection, or out of compliment), or through marriage with those who have ownership, are to be found huddled together, so to speak, in the Court's orders, with nothing to show of what nature or extent their ownership is, thus making those blocks and that enormous area not only unattainable, but unnegotiable also for the purposes of settlement. The titles to blocks which are in this unfinished state are for the purpose of Government purchase found to be very embarrassing, but how much more would they be found embarrassing in the cases of private purchasers were the Government restriction against private purchase removed from the Rohepotae Block. In some of the blocks referred to the owners are numbered by hundreds, so that a purchaser might buy out three-fourths of the owners on the assumption that their shares were all equal and pay accordingly, and then find that although he had paid away three-fourths of the purchase-money he had not acquired one-fourth of the block, and this could only be ascertained by him after the block had again been put into the Native Land Court and the owners' interests defined. But how much more satisfactory and how much easier it would have been to have defined the interests when the block was before the Court in the first instance; then everything in connection with the block was fresh in the mind of the Court: its history, its boundaries, and the rights of those claiming to own it had all been carefully inquired into and the list of names as passed by the Court was the result of such investigation. This surely was the proper time for the Court to take the next and most important of all steps in connection with that block—namely, to define the interests of the owners. No subsequent Court could do it with such little difficulty as could the Court that made the original investigation into the title to the block, and I am of opinion that, when the Court investigates the title to a block of Native land and declares the owners thereof without defining the interest of each, it defeats the real purpose for which the Native Land Court was established in New Zealand—namely, to exchange the Native title for that of one from the Crown, in order to facilitate the settlement of the country.

*Government Land Purchase.*

The purchase of land by Government from the Native owners of Rohepotae Block has not progressed at a very rapid rate during the past year, as the Natives still have a decided objection to selling, or rather, to put it more correctly, they do not yet feel sufficiently the want of money to cause them to part with their land to obtain it. I find that in cases where they really are in want of money they do not discriminate as to who the purchaser is—whether Government or speculator—so long as their desire is satisfied; although, at the present time, the majority of them are agitating for the removal of the restriction against private purchase, on the plea that they can get a better price from the private purchaser than the Government pays. Notwithstanding the numerous drawbacks to contend against, such as the unwillingness of the owners to sell, the defective state of the titles already referred to, and the uncertainty of the area of the blocks until they are surveyed, some progress has, however, been made. The Government has ten blocks at present under purchase, and, supposing the shares of all the owners in each to be equal, it has acquired about 10,500 acres to date. Negotiations are also in progress for the purchase of four other blocks, containing altogether about 30,000 acres. Two of these, representing about 20,000 acres, can be completed forthwith on the surveys being made and the areas known, because the number of owners in each was purposely made few by the Natives in order to facilitate sale.

*Visit of the Hon. the Native Minister to Otorohanga.*

The Hon. Mr. Cadman, as Native Minister, paid a visit to the Ngatimaniapoto Tribe at Otorohanga in April last, accompanied by Mr. Lewis, the Under-Secretary for the Native Department. He was cordially welcomed by the Natives, and kept fully employed during the two days and nights